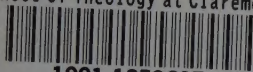


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# MINISTRY AND THE PRESENT CHRIST

## *An Appeal for Unity*

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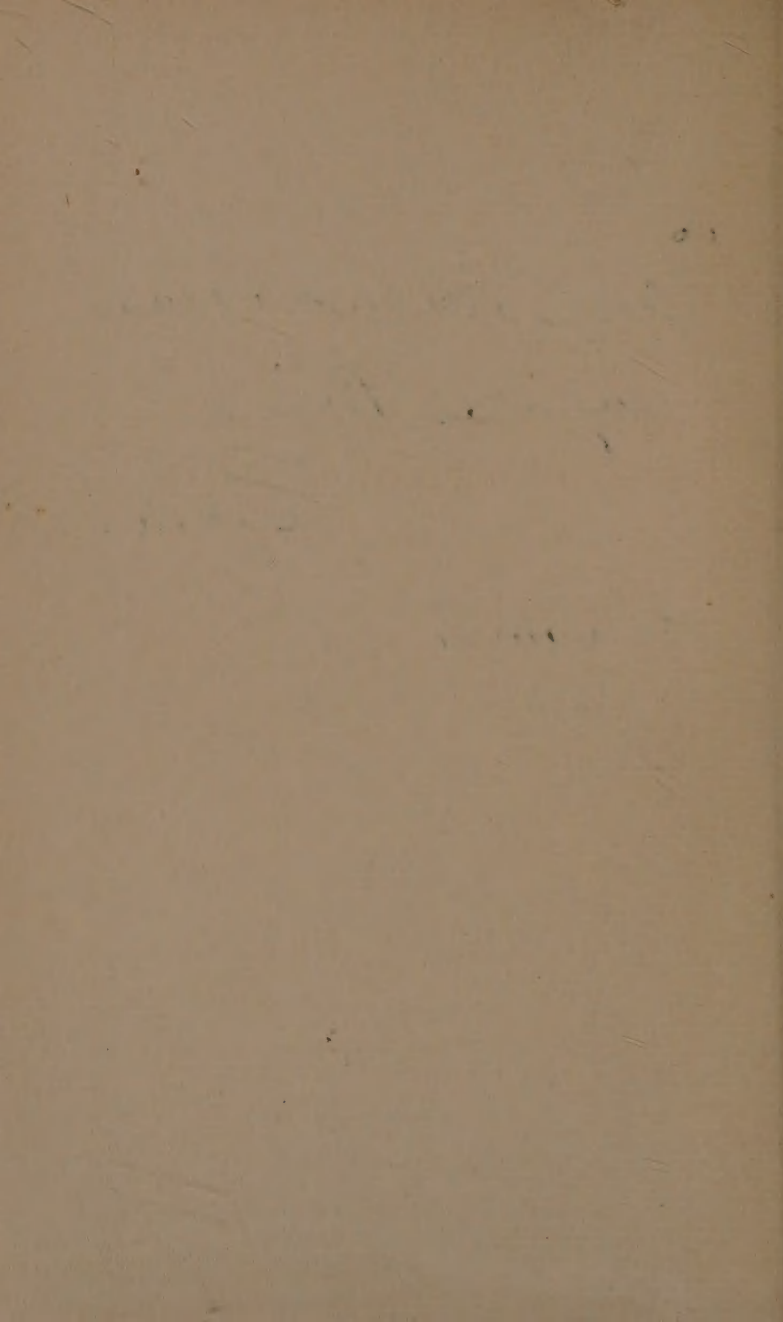
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my Dear Friend

C. A. S.

All Saints

1908







**THE HISTORIC MINISTRY  
AND THE PRESENT CHRIST**

By Charles Lewis Slattery, D.D.

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THE HISTORIC MINISTRY  
AND THE PRESENT CHRIST

An Appeal for Unity

BY

CHARLES LEWIS SLATTERY, D.D.

RECTOR OF CHRIST CHURCH IN SPRINGFIELD



LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.

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## NOTE

THE trend of this appeal found expression in a sermon at the recent Commencement of Berkeley Divinity School. Since many of the clergy who heard it frankly marked their assent, I am led to believe that the point of view is somewhat general among us. If the essay serves at all to strengthen the conviction that our craving for unity is modest and sincere, it will have done its task.

C. L. S.

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**THE HISTORIC MINISTRY  
AND THE PRESENT CHRIST**



# THE HISTORIC MINISTRY AND THE PRESENT CHRIST

## I

**C**HURCH Unity of some definite sort is more and more a demand of the Christian instinct. It is every day more futile to explain that the Church can get on well enough without it. Easy-going compliment, the protest that one form of Christianity is as good as another, the assurance that evangelical bodies already have sufficient agreement on the main doctrines of the Faith, will not bring to the Church the efficiency and beneficent power which might come with one firmly-knit organism. There was an age when unity had to be sacrificed to the sacredness of the individual. We may now believe that the individual can maintain

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his rights in an inclusive organization to which he shall yield the supreme duty of loyalty.

The English Church and the Episcopal Church in America have been foremost in making definite proposals of a basis for union. To some this has seemed unnecessary; to others haughty. To a good many people it has been the pledge of a great future. But even to these gracious listeners there has been one stumbling-block, — the historic ministry.

The feeling has been that the historic Church of the English race has been presumptuous, relying too exclusively on its historic continuity, quite ignorant of God's manifest gifts to ministries of less conventional order. That this is not a true interpretation these pages will attempt to show. The story is told of a mediæval saint that, upon hearing

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of a certain holy lady, he determined to prove her real quality, of which he was doubtful. Riding through rain and mire to her convent door, he begged that she pull off his muddy boots. Instantly she drew back in scorn: What! she — the holiest lady in the neighbourhood — to pull off the boots of any mortal! “Whereat,” records the saint, “I perceived that she was not truly good; for she had no humility.” It is the quality of humility which men must find in the attitude of those who value the historic ministry. They must discover an aspiration beyond any outward confidence.

## II

**I**F we search history for the illustration of a man confident in his orders yet meek in his sense of lack, we find no one more exactly fitted to our need than St. Paul. He did not receive his commission as the older apostles received theirs. There was a suspicious uniqueness about it, and very many in the feeble Church resented his independent attitude. "When Matthias was chosen," they doubtless said, "there was a regular and duly certified appointment from God *through the original apostles*. Why will not this Saul of Tarsus submit to a similar appointment through the original band?" It is true that St. Paul was sure of his

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appointment directly from the glorified Christ upon a definite day at a definite spot hard by Damascus. But there was still a strange exception in it. One suspects that only the enormous effectiveness of his labours at last convinced the conservative members of the apostolic body. This effectiveness, both in thought and in action, is the most startling in the whole history of the Church. We see to-day that St. Paul was the divinely appointed means of adapting the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world, and we cannot imagine Christianity without him.

Because St. Paul's ministry combined two elements which are often separated, — and at no time more than now, — he preserved his mingling of confidence and humility. The first of these elements was his insistence upon continuity with the past, — his inalienable

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right to be called an apostle; and the second, his insistence that, to make his ministry valid, Christ must, step by step, impart to him an immediate authority. To use St. Paul's own words, he began to be an apostle the moment when it pleased God . . . to reveal His Son in him, that he might preach Him. "I live," he said immediately after, "yet not I, but Christ lives in me." Historic Continuity *and* the Present Christ, — that is the summary of St. Paul's unique leadership in the history of the Church. It was this man, perpetually faulted as proud and self-contained, who feared lest having preached the Gospel to others, he himself might be a castaway. There was profound humility behind the authoritative confidence of St. Paul.

### III

LET us think therefore of St. Paul's attitude towards authority in the past. Here at once we encounter a common misconception. In his radical and brilliant book, *The Beginnings of Christianity*, Professor Wernle defines an apostle as one who hands down the tradition: "he is one of a company who secure for the Christian community the connection with the Jesus of history." He then maintains that when, after his heavenly vision, St. Paul refused to go up to Jerusalem, and straightway started to preach the Gospel on his own account, he thereby abandoned apostleship and became rather a prophet of revelation. "In-

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terpret and explain the vision as you will," says Professor Wernle, "you must admit the leap. It was not the apostles whom Jesus called while He lived on earth, to whom He confided the whole of His message — it was not they who really continued His work, but the great persecutor of the Christians whom a revelation summoned to the leadership . . . Only a prophet, no ordinary apostle, could utter the word that should set the stagnant masses in motion."

Now it must be admitted that there is much truth in this, but after the fashion of a good many very clever people, Dr. Wernle fails to note several facts that would be inconvenient for his theory. The first is that St. Paul himself recognized no "leap." He knew himself to be as immediately and really called by the visible Christ as

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was St. Peter. He, quite as the rest, had his face-to-face commission. There was for him nothing subjective or dreamlike in the commission on the Damascus road: the objective, living, real Christ stood before him and created him an apostle. No lot cast by apostles, after the manner of Matthias's election, was to be tolerated. Let those doubt who would: his appointment was complete. Then, in the second place, St. Paul, having been uniquely appointed, was no separatist. When the Gentile Question threatened to wreck the little Christian community, St. Paul gladly submitted the problem to "the apostles and presbyters" especially convened for the purpose in Jerusalem. Their decision was his. This is not the act of one who has broken with the original idea of apostleship. Added meaning, increased power,

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he did give to it; but it maintained its hold on the recognized authority of the past.

One sturdy truth which is being emphasized by all scholars, conservative and radical, is that the historic ministry is not the less divine even if we grant that it was not imposed upon the Church complete at the start, but was permitted to develop with the growth of ecclesiastical needs. As I gather the trend of modern conservative scholarship, men who care for historic continuity do not think that, in the forty days between the Resurrection and the Ascension, our Saviour gave His apostles explicit directions about Church government and Church rites. They believe that He did something infinitely better: He breathed on them and said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." Through the Holy Spirit He Himself

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was to be with the Church in a way more powerful and direct than when He was visible in the streets of Jerusalem. Through the Holy Spirit He should, moment by moment, guide them into all truth. We are seeing now, as never before, that whether Christ in the days of His Incarnation spoke of bishops, priests, and deacons, is a small matter. The essential fact to lay hold of is that Christ, living continuously in His Church, did inspire His followers to develop the ministry as occasion arose till it became, within the primitive age, the institution essentially as we now know it. Here we are to find the approach through which our Christian brethren shall confess the validity and necessity of the historic ministry, of which, by untoward circumstances long past, they have been deprived.

In his illuminating book on *The*

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*Authority of Christ*, Dr. Forrest of Edinburgh conclusively shows how the apostles were never embarrassed by coming upon circumstances for which no word of the Galilean Christ was adequate: "When His word or example were insufficient for present guidance, they never doubted that fresh light would break for them." There was the baffling Gentile Problem, — a question inevitable in the expansion of the Church. Had Christ, in His earthly career, committed Himself to the Pauline view that a man could become a Christian without first becoming a Jew, the disputes of the apostolic age would be inexplicable. No: the apostles, years after the Ascension, knew Christ to be with them. They held a Council; and at the close they said that it seemed good to the Holy Ghost *and to them* to endorse

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the Pauline view. Marvellous audacity, wonderful faith, divine certainty! So Dr. Forrest sees the continuous guidance of Christ in the Church. Then this same keen Scotchman goes forward to show that the ministry developed; and to a certain extent he admits that here too the Spirit directed the development. When he reaches the bishops, Dr. Forrest draws back: Ah, he says, bishops were a mistake. It is an illustration of the strange timidity that suddenly besieges a logical mind. We may be sure that when Dr. Forrest's magnificent general principle is accepted, — as it must be accepted, — even those who now share his prejudice will, of sheer necessity, carry his principle to its certain conclusion. They will see in the primitive development of the ministry the divine controlling influence of Christ.

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If someone suggest that such a doctrine might bring us to a pope, the issue may be bravely faced with the reply that we should gladly welcome such leadership as was exercised by bishops of Rome in primitive ages, when native ability and the conspicuous eminence of Rome as the first city of the world gave them larger duties than rights, quite unlike the dictatorship imposed upon them by the convulsions of later Europe. So, on the other hand, one impressed with the divine order in the development of the papacy, to meet the crisis of the Church when empires were crashing, ought to have faith to believe that God was not absent from His world when He permitted an insignificant German friar to snap his fingers at this same dictator, and thereafter not only to live, but to win to his freedom the more

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intelligent half of Europe. If a principle is sufficiently great in its measure of truth, we must show our fidelity by allowing it to saturate all the facts in its course. If it is indeed true that

“One accent of the Holy Ghost  
The heedless world hath never lost,”

it becomes us to listen patiently to what the world has reported. What we call the historic ministry has aroused a loyalty not only ancient but continuous. God has permitted change of emphasis, now loud, now soft, but the institution has persisted.

The Anglican Communion has stood staunchly by the historic ministry as one of the four essentials for Church unity. That part of the Christian world which hitherto has cared little for it is gaining respect for this continuous chain of living witnesses for the truth as it is in Jesus. There is

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need only to discriminate, to demonstrate the historic order, and with sweet reasonableness to plead for what history has clearly enough shown to be the will of Christ *for us*. Many inconsequent and exaggerated theories have been sounded forth, and by their unreasonableness have blinded sane men to a noble and essential idea: we need to be content with the blessed fact and to let it speak for itself. We ought, in the fear of God, to make no disparaging remarks about the ministry of others whose commission we think less regular than our own. One fact we may cling to with tenacity, and that is, that with all rational clearness we are sure that the ministry of the Anglican Communion is, in outward, visible, orderly fashion, a continuation of that first sacred ministry originated in Palestine before the face of Christ.

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“I come with the authority of an unbroken past,” each officer of this Communion may say; “I tell you the high truths of our redemption as, by most solemn injunction, they were told to me. Times have been, when to pass this truth forward meant persecution, even death. Yet the passing of the message from old man to young man has never failed. I stand up with an outward authority, guarded by all the dignity of the ages, to proclaim Christ.” There is no theorizing here. There is only the fact. The task before a Christian minister is so sublime that he craves all the authority he can get for it.

#### IV

SO much, then, we may say for the confidence in a formal and outward authority. It is the same sort of confidence which St. Paul was proclaiming in his *Apologia* to the Galatians. But this is only half the story. Had St. Paul stopped here he never would have swayed the Mediterranean world as he did sway it. Had he said, "I have had my commission from Christ on the Damascus road, I have been duly acknowledged to be an apostle by the older brethren; therefore I have a message of authority to give you," then his name would, I think, have been unknown, his influence nothing. Yet that is the way a good

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many clergymen undertake to preach the Gospel. St. Paul valued the historic Christ and his connection with Him, but it was the living, glorified, present Christ who was his chief stay and inspiration. Day by day, in all his frightful hardships, he smiled, as at trifles; for side by side with him always walked Christ, — not the Christ of hard past authority, but the present Christ, — guiding, cheering, helping him, lifting him to the high hills of joy. “When it pleased God,” he said once, “to reveal His Son in me . . . ” — that was the beginning. But it was only the beginning: the Christ revealed to Him on the way to Damascus *stayed* with him. He was each day more real to him. “To me,” St. Paul said, “to live is just one thing — it is *Christ*.” Is it not plain why Europe began to bow before the name of Christ? Is it not plain

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why Europe to-day is Christian? It is because in the first days a man went up and down the Roman roads and crossed the Great Sea on many voyages, and so spoke and so acted and so looked that men said, "We have seen a god"—and they had: they had seen, heard, felt Jesus Christ through the glowing personality of His chief servant, St. Paul.

How humiliating it is that over and over in all the years the Church has to be roused to this supreme truth. Because some men cast outward authority aside, and depend wholly on the inner light, we see all sorts of grotesque novelties, and we hear jangling absurdities. "This," we say, "though in Christ's Name, is not Christ." Therefore, taught by these uncanny phenomena, we say that we will depend on the hard witness of his-

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tory, we will have nothing to do with visions either waking or sleeping, we will act as if Christ were dead for nineteen centuries. It is the perversity of human nature that it will only with difficulty and pain grasp complementary truths. It is just as bad that Christianity, abandoning the balancing influence of continuous history, should be wild, erratic, visionary, unreliable; as that, clinging exclusively to the past witness, it should be lifeless, heartless, cold. If one course brings enthusiasm, the enthusiasm lacks sound life. If the other course brings accuracy of life, the life is too cheerless to be worth living. These authorities are not two; they are one transcendent, inclusive authority: each needs the other for assurance and for confirmation. Why cannot all men in the Church gladly accept both authorities

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in their fulness? Let us have the authority of the past, and, at the very same time, the confidence that God will speak to us now. If we are sane and brave, we must know that there never can be any contradiction. The blind traditionalist is afraid to listen to the Christ of to-day. There was Newman, leaving the English Church because, confessedly, he feared the era of relentless scientific and historic investigation: in other words, he was clinging so close to the Christ of the fourth century that he dared not reach out hands of faith to the living Christ of modern England. On the other hand, the man sure of the "inner light," sure of Christ now, often becomes intoxicated with his possession, and closes his ears to all past messages, because he is afraid of them, and so becomes unreasonable, perhaps fanati-

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cal. He is becoming a visionary, rather than a man of visions. Thus fine spirits like Fox the Quaker and Swedenborg the Mystic leave historic Christianity and wander away in the fields of strange vagaries.

We in our branch of the Church are in no danger of minimizing the historical witness: that is part of our fibre. But we are in constant danger of being content with a formal past authority, and so turn deaf ears to the Christ of to-day. Bishop Gore, a representative leader of this generation, records with a shudder how Bishop Butler, one of the wisest of English Churchmen, once said to the eminent Methodist preacher, George Whitfield, "To pretend, sir, to extraordinary gifts of the Spirit is a horrid thing, a very horrid thing." In a flash, we see why the English Church of the eighteenth century lost

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the vitality which an eager reception of the Wesleyan Movement might have imparted. It had not the sense or the piety to see that the true Christian identifies the Christ of History and the Christ of the Present Day.

What we need, what we must have, is a more daring Faith. We must believe that God, having spoken to Moses out of the flaming bush, will, if we obediently listen, speak also to us out of some like ordinary experience. We must believe that Christ, having spoken day by day to St. Paul, will, day by day, if we unlock our ears to listen, speak with us as we walk in The Way with Him. This converse is spiritual, hidden, finding its medium in the interior life. Herein is its intensity, its realness. Contemptible is that timorousness in the Churchman which dares not risk such immediate

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relationship with Christ lest some cherished tradition be snatched away. Truth is eternal, and the Living Voice can but confirm the authoritative witness of the past. Many who seem complacent in their confidence of a sacred past are crying out for a stirring of the dry bones, for a reliance on God which is absolute, not half-way or shrinking. They are praying that ministers of the historic Church, sure of their outward commission, may tread valiantly and gaily with the assurance of a commission more valid still, the commission descending day by day from the throne on high, so that men may say of each one: "Perhaps he read his message in a book, perhaps it was told him by another, but to-day it is coming through him from the Living Christ. We take note that in some way which we cannot describe he has been with Jesus."

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Obviously this abiding presence of the Living Christ is not a possession to be sought only by the clergy. Every Christian man may and ought to live with the expectation of appreciating and realizing in his own experience that Christ is not a dead hero, but a living, divine friend. To how many of us, — laity, deacons, priests, bishops, — He seems quite dead: we talk of Him with all reverence, with all the titles and honours of rightful divinity, but how far away is our tone, how much it sounds like a problem in geometry, and not a vital conviction, beyond and above all need of proof. I make this accusation from no comfortable post of complacent security. I accuse myself first: for my own coldness toward the Eternal Presence, may God be pitiful to me! — But let that pass.

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When a voice is raised to proclaim Christ's immediate nearness, people are prone to come modestly and shyly to their friends and say, "Well, it all seems possible that men should feel the nearness of Christ, — but I, at least, never have had the consciousness of this nearness." This is the confession of many a true heart, of many a one with a righteous record of life well lived, lived in the fear of God, lived with the utmost attention to the example of our Saviour. What then is wrong? Why is Christ still so far away? The reason is clear. Men have been too content with the Christ of History, too content with the outward part of ordinance and sacrament, and so have not reached out to this present, real Christ, who stands near them always, in the light of their joy as in the shadow of their sorrow. There He stands, as He stood

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before Simon and Mary and John and Martha, infinitely kind and strong, — not more their divine Leader than their most human Friend. Who would not go to Him! And there He is, never intruding, but always waiting to receive them. Should any doubt whether He may be known face to face, let me quote a few words written in an altogether different connection and intended to apply to certain scientific phenomena. “The thing we are trained to look for,” says this very candid writer, “is indeed the thing we become capable of seeing. As the painter sees colour and form, and the musician hears harmony, so the heart trained to devout contemplation will see rays of heavenly light and will hear the accents of love where to others all may seem barren and silent.

“ ‘Where one heard thunder and one saw flame,  
I only knew He named my name.’ ”

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I quote this from a scientific point of view because it is a modern echo of the Gospel truth, "Knock and it shall be opened unto you": you must have faith, you must knock, — and there you will find the Living Christ.

Yes, assuredly the Present Christ is for all people, but woe to us of the clergy if we do not aspire to the highest and best ourselves. Too long have we been content with a formal, orderly Christianity. Good and beautiful as that is, it cannot live, much less impart life, unless it is preached by men who dare to say to the Living God, "Teach me, O Father, Thy daily message; guide me, O Christ, into deeper truth; live in me, O Spirit, and each day increase my life." If with such an influx of divine power we see old theories and prejudices melt like little clouds, who can care! The truth of the ages is

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the truth now. Contact with a Living Christ can change it in just one way: whereas it was dead, now it shall live. Each instant it must throb with the Living Personality of Jesus Christ. As with lowest humility we cling to the historic witness, so with courageous faith may we reach out trembling fingers and touch the Living Christ, in Sacrament, in work, in pastime, in common sorrow, and in common joy. O Christ, be known to us in breaking bread, — and then abide with us till evening, far into the night, and through the endless morning of eternity. Speak through us; do deeds through us; be our life.

## V

**WE** who are commissioned with the historic ministry are not urging one another in this day to hold in honour our outward office. There is no need of such exhortation. We take that for granted. There is valid inspiration in remembering that our commission is sealed with the authority of a continuous history. We go forth to our incomparable task with the clear knowledge that we are regularly appointed in the regular way.

But there is need of sober warning. God has taught the world over and over again, from the days when His Chosen went into exile until now, that every outward commission, to reach its fruit-

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age, must have a corresponding reflection in the inner life. With searching of heart we plead one with another eagerly so to live that men may know that every word we speak, we speak not simply because the Church of the ages has taught it, but because it has a firm grasp upon our personal convictions. There are times when we must say that the experience of older, wiser, devouter men has been thus and so, and we gladly defer to their authority. But there are other times when without saying "I" or "me" or "mine," we may let people know that what we are declaring is our own experience. They may know, to their unspeakable comfort, that Christ is real. To speak the Truth is our indispensable function. To have men *know* that we speak it, — candidly, humbly, unswervingly, — is almost as important. We would be

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so real that men may trust us for the best. The confidence is swallowed up in aspiration.

Men upon entering Christ's ministry cease to be private witnesses to Him. They have become ambassadors. The thought of the responsibility, when it has pierced the soul, robs the most assured of his sufficiency. None in such case can insist upon titles of authority: unspeakable peace comes over one who is called servant, — servant to all men, and therefore servant of Him who is servant of all; unspeakable dread looms before one, lest in the tangle of outward things men forget that to be servant is one's consuming prayer and desire. Almost never is there cause to scold and to accuse. But every day is the call to give to men the serene knowledge of God our Father, — such a Father as our

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Lord Christ shows Him to be. By an invariable friendliness, by a complete self-forgetfulness both personal and official, by a passion to help everyone within reach, so would we let men know that the historic ministry is not pretence, but reality. It comes with all the credentials of authority and history. But these credentials alone are insufficient. Men are not convinced through the mind. The heart is the highroad to conviction, and men will be convinced indeed only when they can say of any of us, "This man loves men somewhat as He loved them who gave His life for them."

Church unity will come at last through a generous inclusiveness wherein each will admit the other's best, though unaccustomed and strange. Some of those who see the vision of what unity might accomplish for men's

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highest good, suggest a basis for union. There is humility as well as confidence in that suggestion. The Church of the future when fulfilled must be one; and it may safely be predicted that the ministry thereof will be joined with the past by historic continuity; but, more than all, it will feel its immediate commission from the Present Christ.

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